"At age 27, she gets furious": scripts on marriage and life course variation in The Netherlands, 1850-1970

Kok, Jan

Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version
Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

"At age 27, she gets furious". Scripts on Marriage and Life Course Variation in The Netherlands, 1850-1970

Jan Kok *

Abstract: *»"Mit 27 Jahren wird sie unruhig": Skripte über Ehe und Lebensverlauf-Variation in den Niederlanden, 1850-1970«.* Marrying too old, too young, or not at all could elicit scorn from all sides: family, friends and neighbours. The same could occur when a partner was much younger or older. During modernization new societal norms on marriage are supposed to have emerged and to have become more pervasive, as individual access to and timing of marriage became less dependent on family fortunes and family strategies. In this article, life courses of more than 15,000 Dutch individuals are studied in order to answer the question: was their timing of marriage and choice of partner related to (changing) life scripts – and what social or cultural groups were the carriers of these scripts – or still predominantly determined by family dynamics?

Keywords: Celibacy, late marriage, early marriage, age homogamy, life scripts.

1. Introduction

Following the seminal work of Dixon (1971), variation in timing and incidence of marriage has generally been studied by looking at three factors: feasibility of marriage, desirability of marriage, and availability of partners. Feasibility indicates the possibility for a couple to form a new family, which depends on earning capacity on the one hand, and residential customs and expected living standards on the other. Feasibility, and thus age at marriage, is affected by economic cycles and squeezes on the housing market. Social classes may differ strongly in what is considered a proper economic foundation for a family. Furthermore, income profiles differ by age and class. For instance, whereas elite men needed to complete higher education and acquire a good position to properly ground their marriage, many manual workers reached their peak earnings at an early age and saw no reason to postpone marriage. Similarly, the desirability of marriage can change over time and differ by gender and across subgroups. The more attractive alternatives to marriage exist, the less desirable marriage becomes. In particular, scholars have pointed at the increase of female education and female employment to explain the decrease in early marriage of women. The desirabil-

* Jan Kok, Afdeling Geschiedenis, Radboud University Nijmegen, PO Box 9103, 6500 HD Nijmegen, Netherlands; j.kok@let.ru.nl.

ity of marriage and family life tends to increase after major societal upheavals, such as war (Hacker 2008). Finally, the availability of partners depends, of course, on the demographic characteristics of the marriage market, which can be skewed by gender-specific mortality or migration, but perhaps even more on the preferences for the 'right' partner, who may have to be selected from a restricted racial, ethnic, religious or social subgroup, in combination with a preferred age.

Dixon's framework is an elegant combination of cultural, economic and demographic factors, but these components are difficult to separate. Is it possible to study the more or less autonomous impact on marriage of 'life scripts', in particular age norms on the proper timing of life course transitions (see Boonstra, Bras and Derks 2014 in this HSR Focus). Is it possible to find out whether people were adhering to norms when marrying at a given age, and can we distinguish that from their personal economic situation and their personal likelihood of finding a partner? How to conceptualize such norms? In her discussion of age norms Marini (1984) describes their distinguishing features: "it involves a collective, or shared, evaluation of what behavior ought to be […] it involves the application of sanctions to induce a particular behaviour" (232).We need to ask ourselves the following questions. First, what was the actual content of norms on marriage? Second, what does 'collective' stand for: specific social groups, local communities or the entire nation? Finally, to what extent did sanctions exist and when could they function effectively – if at all?

Research in this field is guided by the notion of a cultural shift in the appreciation of marriage and family life during the 'long' nineteenth century. Inspired by Enlightenment notions, the emerging bourgeoisie put great value on the family as the major locus of moral improvement of society, and as the place where the new roles that industrializing society demanded of men, women and children were to be learned and enacted. The lower classes followed suit and began to marry younger and more often as, according to Matthijs (2002, 2003), their 'mimetic appetite' for marriage increased. Not only did marriage become more popular, the quality of marital relations changed according to several scholars. The role of instrumental motives for marrying and in the selection of a partner (e.g. the running of a family business) began to decrease and to be replaced by a greater emphasis on love and personal compatibility (e.g. Shorter 1975; Gillis 1985). According to some, this shift towards individual choices resulted from economic modernization, as on the one hand the number of economic niches expanded and on the other hand the grip of family and local community on those niches weakened. But so far, no strong links have been found between industrialization and urbanization and changes in marriage patterns, suggesting that a more or less autonomous cultural change might have been going on (Van de Putte et al. 2009).

The nineteenth and early twentieth century supposedly saw a shift from 'instrumental' marriage choices to choices based on romantic love, which became

a new norm. It can be said that in the older pattern marriage was geared to the logic of the family economy and demographic hazards (e.g. size of the family, death of one of the parents), whereas in the new pattern individual characteristics (education, income prospects et cetera) became paramount. In the older pattern, the limited availability of economic niches implied that a sizeable number of people could not marry, or had to wait a long time before acquiring the proper means to marry. This does not mean that the community looked approvingly at celibate or late-marrying. On the contrary, celibates were never considered 'true' adults. And marriage should take place with a (broad) age range. The choice of partners was – to some extent– also ' instrumental' meaning that age or civil status could be less important than work skills, dowry or property brought to the marriage. But, again, strong differences in age between spouses were disapproved of by the community. The shift towards 'modern', romantic marriage implied that the traditional reasons for delaying or foregoing marriage became less important for individuals. Concomitant with this shift is greater equality of marriage partners, in terms of ages.

In this article, I will use reconstructed life courses from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to answer the question to what extent marriage frequency and timing merely reflects individual desirability and feasibility to marry and to what extent we can discern social or cultural group norms. This relates to options B and C in Table 2 in Boonstra, Bras and Derks, this HSR Focus. I will focus on life course 'deviations' from a) the norm prescribing marriage as the natural fulfillment of adult lives; b) the norm that marriage should not take place before or beyond a given age range and c) the norm that age differences between spouses should be limited. In doing so, I hope to assess the potential weight of (subgroups) scripts in relation to family factors influencing marriage timing. Moreover, I will test whether a supposed change in life scripts translate into earlier, more frequent and more age homogamous marriages in the course of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In doing so, I hope to contribute to the ongoing discussion on the nature of changes in marriage patterns during modernization. In the next section, I will discuss expressions of marriage norms in Dutch 19th and early 20th century society. Then, I will briefly introduce the data and methods employed in this study. In a further section, I will look at individual backgrounds and the potential role of collective life scripts in marrying 'early', 'late' or not at all, and then I will discuss whether these backgrounds and scripts are also related to marrying a much older of younger spouse.

2. Scripts on Marriage

Societal pressure on marriage came in many ways. In 1838, one of the leading newspapers in The Netherlands published a 'Lover's Thermometer', a 'comic'

life course scenario of the life of spinsters and bachelors. It is too long to reproduce here, but some examples may suffice. At each age, an impression of feelings toward marriage and others is given. For the spinsters, the Thermometer starts at age 15, "when she desires to make her entry into the world at large and to attract the attention of men". At age 23, "she flirts with every man she meets". At age 27, "she gets furious, and cannot stand it when other girls of her age make a good match". At age 29, "she despairs of ever getting married and takes her resort to all kinds of intrigues to attain marital status". The Thermometer then goes on to describe how her character turns for the worse by not being married: she shifts her interest to adornment (age 31); she gets jealous when other women are praised (35), she quibbles with her married friend (36), she enjoys discussing marital problems of her friends with others (38), she becomes evil (39), malignant (43) and sanctimonious (45). At age 49, "she takes a destitute relative in her house who has to care for her". Finally, at age 50, "her aversion to the world gets the upper hand and she pours all her wickedness on her unhappy caretaker". For the bachelor, the scenario is a bit different. He starts later and is initially more hesitant, and the Thermometer does allow him a relation (at age 24), but it ends due to his arrogance. At age 30, "he is sullen and grumpy when the discussion turns to marriage". He is not giving up, however, and feels he can still get "a young dove" (age 34), he falls in love with a girl of seventeen (age 35), but is rejected (at age 36). His later life course is characterized by increasing health problems and fear of solitude. At age 49, he takes in a housekeeper, and when – at last – he decides to marry her (age 59), he dies *(Nieuwe Amsterdamsche Courant en Algemeen Handelsblad*, 9 October 1838).

This Thermometer stands in a long tradition of derision on the lives of spinsters and bachelors, which has been documented in various studies (Froide 2005; Vicinus 1985; Chambers-Schiller 1984; Israel 2002, de Haan and Stam 1985; Dorsman and Stavenuiter 1993). Although the general norm to marry was clear, a sizeable number of men and women remained celibate. The literature has suggested several economic, familial and religious factors to explain why in some groups celibacy persisted or even increased in a period when the 'appetite for marriage' became stronger. Firstly, in some groups marriage delay and (eventual) celibacy was associated with increased standards of living, which kept people from forming a family (also Van Poppel, 1992, 103ff; Kohlbrugge 1928). This 'increased relative costs of marriage' scenario applied especially to people from the middle and upper classes. Secondly, increased celibacy of women from the higher classes has been associated with the expansion of education and career opportunities, which were not compatible with married life. Contemporaries complained that women from the upper class were wary of giving up their independent life style and were unwilling to take up the role of housewife. Kohlbrugge (1928, 4) wrote: "The woman [in intellectual circles, JK] has become so individualistic, that she misses the adaptability necessary for marriage" (also Adams 1996). On the other side of the social spectrum

stood living-in farmhands, for whom remaining celibate compared favourable to the situation of married laborers. In farming families, the designated successor was often a son. As a number of them did not manage to find (or afford) a wife, we can expect that farmer's sons were relatively likely to remain single. In urban families, we often find that the youngest daughter stayed at home to 'bring the parents to the end', that is care for them until they died. Although she received the parental home, this daughter often married late or not at all (Bras and Kok 2003). Finally, a possibility is that the choice to remain unmarried was inspired by religious motives. Among Roman Catholics celibacy was evaluated much more positive than among Protestants, even for celibates who did not take up a career as nun or priest but became nurse or gardener in a cloister. In contrast, a (neo-Calvinist) Protestant theologian judged "celibacy in order to preserve one's independence crude selfishness and morally objectionable" (cited in Van Solinge and Van Poppel 1995, 157).

Apart from minimal ages (18 for boys and 16 for girls) and the requirement of parental consent (up until age 30) in the Netherlands, legal restriction on marriage were limited. But there existed an extended normative discourse on the proper age to marry. The contemporary advice literature suggested 25 years as the ideal age and warned against too early and too late marriages (Van Poppel 1992). This literature catered for the burgeoning upper-middle classes. For the farming and lower classes, especially in the countryside, unwritten customs were more important. Many indications (ranging from sayings to contemporary surveys) indicate a clear spectrum of proper and improper behaviour with respect to marriage. For men, a critical threshold seems to have been age thirty. In several regions charivari marked their transition to permanent celibacy, e.g. by presenting them a symbolic key to the 'oxen's meadow' (Van Poppel 1992). Similarly, many sayings and abusive terms indicated the hopelessness of unmarried women between 25 and 30. Often, 28 was named as the critical age for girls. There are less indications of popular resentment of too early marriages. People could started courting between age 16 and 18. However, too early marriages among the working class were a great concern for the higher echelons of society, especially those responsible for social policy. Despite all their warnings against the problems ensuing from 'untimely marriages', the marriages of the poor were not curbed. One of the arguments against restriction was that this would lead to an increase in illegitimate births – as most of the early marrying women were already pregnant (Van Poppel 1992). Similarly, norms against large age differences between spouses can be found in advice literature, proverbs and sanctions in the form of charivari. Endogamy in terms of social standing and religion was the ideal, and the same hold true for age. People of different ages simply did not match: 'Young with old, is hot with cold' (Van Poppel, 1992, 47). Especially, marriages in which the wives were much older than their husbands were scorned. Youth groups would present couples with large age gaps with straw dummies, signifying barrenness.

Supposedly, the nineteenth and early twentieth century witnessed a gradual shift away from 'instrumental marriage' for which a proper economic foundation was dominant over other considerations. Furthermore, marriage became more popular as it opened the door to the idealized family life and to individual fulfilment through romantic love. In short, marriage became more feasible and desirable, at least in some social groups. Romantic marriages require more communication and emotional encounters between partners, which presuppose shared experiences and outlooks, which, in turn, is more likely among age peers. Therefore, the supposed shift toward less instrumental marriage is also expected to result in larger age homogamy. Can we trace the groups and social settings where this normative shift occurred and where, in other words, new life scripts emerged? The research in this area hypothesizes 'laggards' and 'forerunners'. For the elite and for farmers, marriage still rested on economic considerations and strategies of partner selection were geared to finding the right partner who could add to the family fund (Kok, Mandemakers and Damsma 2010). Other supposed 'laggards' are Roman Catholics. In the Catholic perception of marriage, (romantic) love plays a secondary role to procreation and patriarchal dominance of the husband over the wife was valued. Also, celibacy was evaluated more positively than among Protestants. Moreover, the role of familial concerns (e.g. the influence of the parents on their children's marriage) it supposed to be stronger than among (Calvinist) protestants (Van de Putte et al. 2009). In terms of marriage motivations, the middle classes are 'associated with respect for the formal family scripts' (Van de Putte et al. 2009, 1238) implying a sound economic foundation for marriage, but are also supposed to take an interest in romantic love. The lower classes are seen as more unambiguous forerunners in the move toward romantic, egalitarian marriage. In this move, urban dwellers are believed to have taken the lead, as (big) cities were 'the core area of cultural change' (Van de Putte et al. 2009, 1239). Traditional social control mechanism did not function here and 'the concentration of people, ideas, and information broadened one's horizon and expectations' (Van de Putte et al. 2009, 1239). Summing up, an emerging life script that makes marriage – ideally with a same-age partner – a popular and individualized option is expected to lead to a decline in celibacy and late marriage, and possibly to a shift to early marriage as well. Moreover, we expect a decrease of older wife and older husband marriages in favour of same-age marriages. We expect these changes to occur among city dwellers, non-Catholics, and wage workers. To find out whether these groups indeed adhered to 'new' scripts, we need to control for other factors that may explain why individuals married late or not at all, or why they had to contend themselves with an older or younger partner. In the next section, I will explain how this can be done.

3. Data and Methods

This study is based on a large database, the Historical Sample of the Netherlands (HSN). The project compiles life course data as completely as possible for a representative portion of the 19th and 20th century population (Mandemakers 2006). For this paper, I make use of the *Data Set Life Courses Release 2010.01*. This dataset covers the currently available data of the HSN in three parts: a) the provinces Utrecht, Friesland Zeeland and the city of Rotterdam for the birth period 1850-1882 (N=5.827), b) the other parts of the Netherlands for the birth period 1863-1882 (N=7.767) and c) the entire country for the birth period 1883-1922 (N=23.579). As we focus on persons who have reached age fifty, the end of our period is roughly 1970. To study shifts and variations in the propensity to marry late, early or not at all, I refine the model proposed earlier by Engelen and Kok (2003). In their article, they used life course data from the birth cohort 1890-1909. We can now use a much larger sample as well as add more data on the household situation at an age when most young people had not yet started a serious search for marriage partners. I use a 'snapshot' of relevant characteristics (socio-economic status, religion, place of residence) and household composition at age eighteen and use this as a 'predictor' of the later 'marital career'. I am interested in four outcomes: (relative) early marriage, 'normal' marriage, late marriage and celibacy. I employ a technique called multinomial (or polytomous) logistic regression which is a suitable method for modelling discrete choices. This technique is a variant of binary (or dichotomous) logistic regression, which was developed to analyse dependent variables with only two outcomes (yes or no). In that situation, a non-linear model is more appropriate than a linear regression. The probability (p) of the dependent variable being a yes or no is calculated in terms of *odds*, that is the probability of a "yes" divided by the probability of a "no" (p/(1-p)). The regression coefficients of the independent variables are the natural logarithms of the odds. By exponentiation, we obtain *odds ratios*. These indicate the increase in the odds of the dependent variable of being a yes resulting from an increase of one unit in the independent variable (Menard 1995). In the multinomial variant, the probabilities are calculated in relation to a baseline or reference category. In my model, the reference group is defined as "marrying at a normal age" (23-30 for men and 21-28 for women).

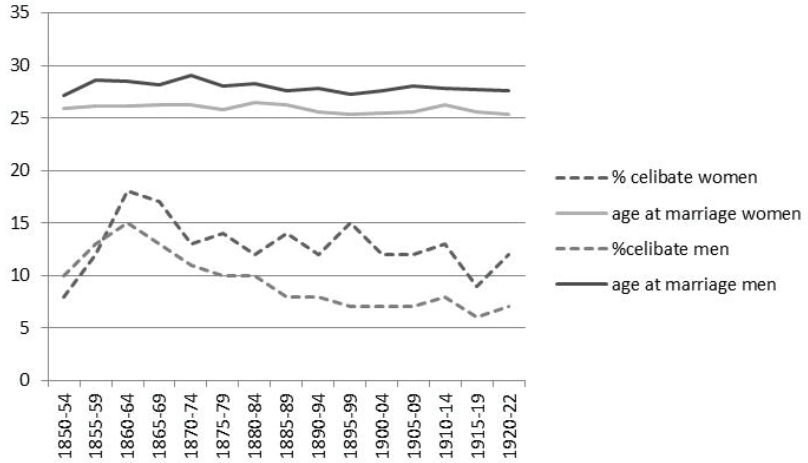
In categorizing religious denominations I follow a distinction between Liberal and Orthodox protestant groups discussed in more detail elsewhere (Kok and Van Bavel 2006), but I create a separate category for the highly liberal, rather elite groups of Remonstrants and Mennonites. In our earlier research on the cohort 1890-1909, Remonstrants and Mennonites stood out with very high percentages never married, for men and women alike (Engelen and Kok 2003). In the final decades of the nineteenth century, the Remonstrant Church experienced a period of strong growth, due to an influx of liberal Protestants who were escaping

a revival of orthodoxy in their own churches (Knippenberg 1992). Typically, the Remonstrants were urban, wealthy and freethinking. The Mennonites shared a tendency towards free thought with the Remonstrants, but were more strongly rural-based, particularly in the north-western Netherlands. Their decline during the twentieth century has been ascribed to very low marital fertility (and high levels of apostasy) (Knippenberg 1992, 134) but, apparently, high celibacy also contributed. The categorization of social groups in based on the stratification scheme HISCLASS (Van Leeuwen and Maas 2011) which builds on the international coding scheme HISCO (Van Leeuwen, Maas and Miles 2002). To find out whether urban places are indeed in the forefront of innovative marital behaviour, we distinguish on the basis of population size (census).

To find an 'autonomous' role for group norms, one needs to control for other factors influencing age and incidence of marriage. Clearly, it is near impossible to locate and reconstruct all factors that influence marital choices over the life course. One would have to possess information on, on the hand, individual education, income (prospects), family situation, personal health and beauty, and on the other hand the state of the local marriage market, taking account of expected preferences for a partner with the same religion, ethnic and social background, and age. Moreover, one would have to take conjunctural changes into account, which may shift the age at marriage up or downwards. Most of this information is not available in the Historical Sample of the Netherlands. The censuses do not give information on the local marriage market (number of unmarried men and women by age) apart from a number of cities. Thus, we will have to limit ourselves to two 'individual factors': the family situation at age 18 and personal migration experience. Young people who have already lost one or both parents are less likely to follow the 'instrumental-marriage' scenario in which the parents have a strong say in whether and when to marry. Thus, celibacy and late marriage may be less likely. The possibly difficult situation of a broken family may induce young people to marry as quickly as possible, and this means they may not be fastidious in their choice of partner, in other words, they may tend to have less often a same-age partners than others. Another aspect of the family situation is the number of younger brothers and sisters. A large number of younger siblings may increase the pressure on a person to make room and marry early, and it will be less likely that a person will have to take care if his/her ageing parents. Migrants will have to adjust to their new surroundings, which often resulted in a more protracted process of partner choice and marriage (Moreels and Matthijs 2011; Kok 2006). In this model, I only look at the difference between place at residence and birth place, and distinguish between rural and urban migrants. Before, presenting the models, I describe and discuss some general trends that emerge from the data.

4. General Trends

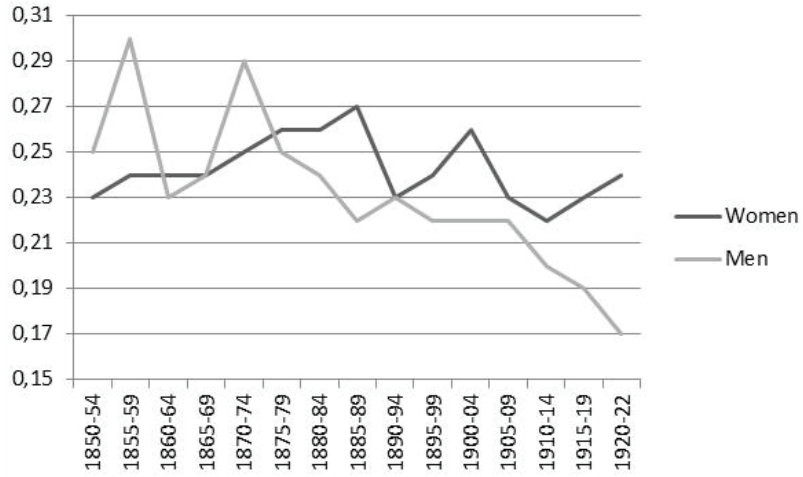
Figure 1: Ages at First Marriage and Percentages of Permanent Celibacy, by Birth Cohort



Source: Historical sample of the Netherlands. Data Set Life Courses Release 2010.01.

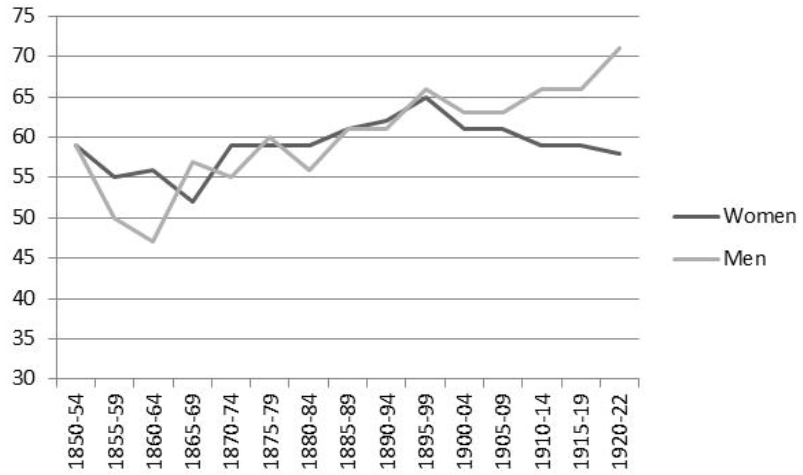
When we arrange the data by birth period, the first observation is that the changes in marriage patterns described for, among others, Flemish cities (e.g. Van de Putte 2009) are conspicuously absent for the Netherlands as a whole (Figure 1). We do find a decrease in celibacy, in particular for men. Their celibacy ratio drops below ten percent already in the cohorts born after 1885. For women, the high levels of the cohort 1860-1869 are not replicated in younger cohorts, but the decline is less marked. Age at marriage for both sexes is surprisingly constant. These findings more or less match the outcomes of Van Poppel (1992). He saw a decline in celibacy for men after (birth cohort) 1865, and for women after 1900 (22). Ages at first marriage were quite stable for mid- and late-nineteenth century cohorts and for both men and women dropped after the birth cohort 1905-1909 (Van Poppel 1992, 22). A limited variation around the mean can be seen as an indication of conformity (Van Poppel and Nelissen 1999). A decrease in the variation coefficient can be expected when more people marry at the 'appropriate' (or average) age. Interestingly, for women such a trend is not visible, but men born after 1885 do seem to marry more often at the average age than men born earlier (Figure 2). Finally, there seems to be a slight increase in same-age marriages for women born after 1870, but this is not sustained among early twentieth-century cohorts. For men, again, this trend seems stronger and more persistent (Figure 3).

Figure 2: Variation Coefficient of the Age at First Marriage, by Birth Cohort



Source: Historical sample of the Netherlands. Data Set Life Courses Release 2010.01.

Figure 3: Percentage Same-Age Marriages, by Birth Cohort



Same-age marriages defined as first marriages of research persons with no more than three year difference in age with their partner. Source: Historical sample of the Netherlands. Data Set Life Courses Release 2010.01.

Of course, the aggregated data shown in the figures may hide strong differences by social group, type of residence or religion. The multivariate analysis should reveal such differences.

5. Deviations from the Norm

What people – from what socio-economic or cultural group – 'deviated' from the broadly accepted norms that marriage should take place in one's twenties? And what kind of people did not marry at all, to what extent do we find an overlap of permanent celibacy (and possibly causal relation) with delayed marriage? The results of the multinomial logistic regression are presented in the tables 1 (women) and 2 (men). We can clearly see that religion – controlling for other factors – had a decisive influence on the timing of marriage and on celibacy. Roman Catholic women had 58% higher odds of remaining celibate, 44% higher odds of marrying late, and 18% lower odds of an early marriage compared to the liberal protestants. A similar pattern of late marriage and celibacy is found among Catholic men. Rejecting modern forms of family planning, Catholics relied on the traditional option of late marriage as a way to keep the number of children within bounds. In this group, celibacy may have been the end result of a too extended waiting period. As in our previous study, Mennonite and Remonstrant women again stood out with high odds of celibacy, and low chances of an early marriage (but not higher chances of late marriage). In our earlier article, we suggested that women reared in this elite environment received an education and acquired a life-style that did not fit easily with the expected roles of married women. Also, both denominations accorded unmarried women special, respected functions in parish work. For instance, the Mennonites had female deacons in charge of poor relief. Also, these churches were the first to allow women to become priests (in 1905), on the condition that they were not married (Engelen and Kok 2003). If not actually a cause of celibacy, these aspects can at least help to explain why unmarried women remained in these churches (or even switched to them). Orthodox Protestant women and Orthodox Protestant and Jewish men stood out with relatively high chances of late marriage.

Women who, at age 18, lived in an elite household (almost always as daughters) had a higher risk (47%) to remain unmarried than women from the lower middle class, whereas daughters of farmers and unskilled workers had significantly lower risks (Table 2). In the latter group, we see a clear pattern of low chances to remain single or marry late, and high chances of marrying early. This has also been found in a recent analysis of the emergence of the early family formation pattern (Bras et al 2010, 1027). This pattern of more frequent and less late marriage emerged in the late 19th century, which is also reflected in the cohort effects. Especially the women of birth cohort 1890-1909 had a much lower likelihood to marry late (after age 28) than the women of 1850-1869. For both men and women, the decline of permanent celibacy over the birth cohorts is much more apparent than in Table 1. Contrary to what is assumed in the literature, women living in cities do not differ strongly in their marriage behaviour from women living in small municipalities. The urban

employment opportunities associated with cities do not decrease their appetite for marriage strongly, at least not when we control for social background. Interestingly, urban men do stand out with a lower likelihood of remaining celibate, a lower likelihood of late marriage and a higher likelihood of early marriage (Table 3). Thus, for men factors such as marriage market, employment and housing had more effect on incidence and timing of marriage than for women. Among men, we find the same basic patterns of social class effects as among women, with some differences. E.g. sons of farmers were much more likely to delay their marriages than sons from the lower middle class (Table 2).

Does the family configuration, even if we only have a snapshot of the situation at age 18, help us to understand life course outcomes of marriage and celibacy? We find that, for women, compared to living with both parents, all other situations were associated with lower odds of celibacy, lower odds of marrying late and higher odds of marrying early. Especially girls who had already left home, those who lived with their mother only, and those who lived with a stepparent were unlikely to become celibate, probably because they were less inclined than other girls to (return or) stay at home. Girls who lived with a mother only or living in the household of kin also had significantly higher odds to marry early. Is this because of the economic hardship in households run by a mother, making early marriage an attractive way out? We also see that the more younger children (in particular boys) were living in the household, the less likely celibacy and late marriage for women became. Or, in other words, youngest and only girls had higher risks of staying at home. An early marriage was especially likely when a girl had many young sisters. For boys (Table 3), the impact of the family on life course outcomes is more or less similar. An interesting difference is that boys whose mother had died were more likely to remain celibate. Also noteworthy is that whereas girls who had many younger sisters tended to marry early, for this was related to having many younger brothers. In other words, when gender-specific tasks could be taken over by younger siblings, older children were more likely to marry (very) early. This shows that the specific configuration of parents and siblings worked to hasten or delay the process of marriage, putting adherence to (group) scripts in perspective.

Having migrated before age 18 did not affect the risks of celibacy. Interestingly, girls who had migrated from (another) city had higher risks of marrying early.

Table 1: Marriage in the Life Course of Women. Odds Ratios of the Multinomial Logistic Regression on Permanent Celibacy, and on Late and Early Marriage in Reference to Marriage at a Normal Age. Situation at Age 18 (Unmarried Women)

	Permanent Celibacy	Late Marriage	Early Marriage
Religion of head of household (Ref.= Liberal Protestant)			
Catholic	1.576****	1.442****	0.820**
Remonstrant or Mennonite	1.602**	0.743	0.507*
Orthodox Protestant	1.128	1.179*	0.881
Jewish	1.349	1.348	1.164
Nondenominational	1.111	0.825	0.797
Other and unknown	1.289	1.354*	1.080
Social group of head (Ref.=lower middle class)			
Elite	1.473*	0.953	0.625
Skilled workers	0.956	1.033	1.394**
Farmers	0.723**	0.965	0.989
Unskilled workers	0.555****	0.685****	1.758****
Unknown	1.011	0.919	1.216
Size of municipality (Ref.=population size<5000)			
Size 5000-20.000	0.835*	0.919	0.976
Size 20.000-100.000	0.911	0.869	1.097
Size more than 100.000	0.963	0.882	1.120
Birth cohort (1850-1869=ref.)			
1870-1889	0.807**	0.951	1.096
1890-1909	0.694****	0.704****	1.112
1910-1922	0.573****	0.920	1.119
Type of kin co-residence (Ref.=with both parents)			
Left home already	0.509****	0.782***	1.047
With father only	0.911	0.854	1.290
With mother only	0.748**	0.942	1.426**
With a stepparent	0.619***	0.762**	1.054
With other kin	0.812	1.003	1.554*
Children in the household			
Number of girls younger than 16	0.954	0.987	1.099**
Number of boys younger than 16	0.931*	0.938**	0.947
Migration (Ref.=not a migrant)			
Rural migrant	0.987	1.055	0.897
Urban migrant	1.191	1.125	1.500***
Nagelkerke's r^2	0.05		
Number of cases	7808		
Model chi-square	389.44****		

Level of significance: * 0.1; ** 0.05; *** 0.01; **** 0.001. *Notes:* Population at risk is all persons who survived at least to the age of 50 years old. Women already married at age 18 have been removed. *Permanent celibacy* is defined as still being single at time of death and having survived at least until age 50. *Late marriage* is defined as marrying between age 28 and death. *Early marriage* is defined as marrying younger than 21. *Normal age at marriage* is defined as marrying between age 21 and age 27.

Table 2: Marriage in the Life Course of Men. Odds Ratios of the Multinomial Logistic Regression on Permanent Celibacy, on Late and Early Marriage in Reference to Marriage at a Normal Age. Situation at Age 18 (Unmarried Men)

	Permanent Celibacy	Late Marriage	Early Marriage
Religion of head of household (Ref.= Liberal Protestant)			
Catholic	1.214**	1.634****	0.762***
Remonstrant or Mennonite	0.611	0.811	0.506*
Orthodox Protestant	0.850	1.171*	1.020
Jewish	0.762	1.784**	1.187
Nondenominational	1.111	1.294	0.902
Other and unknown	1.016	1.420**	0.828
Social group of head (Ref.=lower middle class)			
Elite	1.949**	1.261	0.278**
Skilled workers	0.773	0.899	0.961
Farmers	1.257	1.433***	0.735*
Unskilled workers	0.848	0.722****	1.260*
Unknown	1.013	0.886	0.840
Size of municipality (Ref.=population size <5000)			
Size 5000-20.000	0.822*	0.921	1.130
Size 20.000-100.000	0.850	0.872	1.322**
Size more than 100.000	0.597****	0.792***	1.405***
Birth cohort (1850-1869=ref.)			
1870-1889	0.671***	0.932	1.112
1890-1909	0.473****	0.751***	0.931
1910-1922	0.454****	0.819*	0.815
Type of kin co-residence (Ref.=with both parents)			
Left home already	0.748*	0.855	1.116
With father only	1.350*	1.206	0.999
With mother only	1.161	1.016	1.132
With a stepparent	0.585***	0.775**	1.033
With other kin	1.387	1.084	1.966***
Children in the household			
Number of girls younger than 16	0.980	0.978	0.957
Number of boys younger than 16	0.947	0.956*	1.066*
Migration (Ref.=not a migrant)			
Rural migrant	0.997	1.112	1.023
Urban migrant	0.970	0.853	1.086
Nagelkerke's r^2	0.06		
Number of cases	7889		
Model chi-square	449.39****		

Level of significance: * 0.1; ** 0.05; *** 0.01; **** 0.001. *Notes:* Population at risk is all persons who survived at least to the age of 50 years old. Men already married at age 18 have been removed. *Permanent celibacy* is defined as still being single at time of death and having survived at least until age 50. *Late marriage* is defined as marrying between age 30 and death. *Early marriage* is defined as marrying younger than 23. *Normal age at marriage* is defined as marrying between age 23 and age 29.

What have we learned from this exercise with respect to life scripts? The models allow us not so much to see emerging new scripts but, by inspecting the transgressions of the traditional age norms, to see in what groups 'instrumental' marriage motives and/or a strong parental hold on one's life could still override those norms. A clear norm existed on the age at which one should be married. Yet, very late marriage was still possible among Catholic women and men, Orthodox protestant men, men and women with other or unknown denominations, and farmer's sons. Very late marriage in this period was unlikely among sons and daughters of unskilled workers and men living in cities. Marriage delay was also uncommon among oldest children and those who left home early or lived with a stepparent. This confirms that parental presence put a brake on marriage, especially for younger children. Do we find similar transgressions when it comes to the 'right' partner? Did, for instance, people from groups with an 'instrumental' marriage delay also tend to marry a partner who was 'too young' or 'too old'?

6. Age Differences between Spouses

To find the connection between scripts on marriage (age) and norms on partner choice, we do a similar exercise. We have defined a 'normal' age difference as three years or less, and distinguish between older husband marriages and older wives marriages, the latter being more rare as well as more culturally deviant. We look at first marriages, but the partner can marry for the second time. In this model, it is important to control for age at marriage, as the likelihood to find a spouse in a given age range is strongly defined by the age at marriage. Thus, people who already marry very young are unlikely to have even younger partners. Table 3 shows that, indeed, the age at marriage explains a lot of the variation in same-age marriage. But even controlling for age at marriage, there is a period effect of stronger age homogamy over time visible, in particular among the men. It is interesting to see that in the older age ranges not only (naturally) the likelihood of marrying a younger partner increases, but also the likelihood of marrying an *older* partner (after age 40 for women, and 35 for men). Apparently, relatively narrow age ranges for 'ideal' partners lose their meaning once people are beyond a given threshold themselves.

In what groups are 'transgressions' of norms governing partner choice more or less likely – controlling for age at marriage? For women, marrying an older husband occurred more often among rural migrants, and marrying a younger husband among daughters of unskilled workers. Women from working class families (both skilled and unskilled) and women living in large cities were less likely to marry an older husband. Also, rural migrant women were less likely to marry a younger husband. These findings are not easy to interpret. Perhaps the lower likelihood of urban, working class women to marry older men can be

explained by the tendency of these men to marry young themselves (Table 2). In that sense, we do not see a breakthrough of a 'romantic' norm of equal partner choice in this group. In fact, as we just noticed, daughters of unskilled workers still tended to marry younger husbands. This might be explained by simple 'instrumental' household economics: women from this class often worked as servants and it took them some time to amass savings to be pooled with the income of a (worker) husband, who might have an income peak in relatively young age.

For men, the supposedly most 'instrumental' choice of marrying an older wife is associated with already having left home at age 18. Their early leaving may have been related to a family crisis. The odds for men living alone with a father or mother are also rather high (but not statistically significant). Contrary to what we expected on the basis of the women's model, it is *less* likely among unskilled workers. Marrying a younger wife is (significantly) more likely among men living with a mother or with other kin and men without a religion.

All in all, we see that whereas religion played a strong role in determining timing and incidence of marriage, there is no indication that it also directly affected the choice for a partner of a given age. Thus, a strong connection between, e.g. Protestantism or secularism and 'romantic' same-age marriage is not likely. (Large) cities seem to be the locus of change, as older husband marriages are less frequent in places of more than 100,000 inhabitants. The lower classes do show the expected shift towards same-age marriages, but the results are ambiguous. In the decline of younger husband marriages women from the lower middle class seem to have paved the way.

Table 3: Odds Ratios of the Multinomial Logistic Regression on Marrying a Younger or Older Partner

	Women		Men	
	Older Husband	Younger Husband	Younger Wife	Older Wife
Age at marriage (Ref.=20-24)				
25-29	0.520****	15.651****	4.563****	0.952
30-34	0.890	64.292****	13.508****	0.995
35-39	1.140	85.879****	23.198****	2.478***
40-44	2.335***	86.577****	21.336****	1.563
45-49	3.117***	37.655****	35.792****	6.559***
50+	3.417**	112.741****	47.781****	5.240**
Religion of head of household (Ref.= Liberal Protestant)				
Catholic	1.096	1.044	0.956	0.964
Remonstrant or Mennonite	1.108	0.677	0.862	0.955
Orthodox Protestant	0.938	1.153	0.925	1.193
Jewish	1.161	1.004	0.898	1.389
Nondenominational	0.842	0.231	1.561*	1.368
Other/unknown	0.973	0.889	0.709*	0.854

Table 3 continued...				
Social group of head (Ref.=lower middle class)				
Elite	1.021	1.604	1.382	1.669
Skilled workers	0.695***	1.491	1.051	0.793
Farmers	1.022	1.133	1.007	0.653*
Unskilled workers	0.729***	1.780***	1.104	0.618***
Unknown	0.964	1.302	1.107	0.663*
Size of municipality (Ref.=population size<5000)				
Size 5000-20,000	0.866*	0.925	1.047	0.863
Size 20.000-100,000	0.946	1.254	0.840	0.916
Size more than 100,000	0.822**	0.999	0.810**	1.034
Birth cohort (Ref.=1850-1869)				
1870-1889	0.883	0.650**	0.795**	0.890
1890-1909	0.875	0.532****	0.752***	0.564***
1910-1922	1.056	0.615	0.751**	0.533**
Type of kin co-residence (Ref.=with both parents)				
Left home already	1.016	1.211	1.071	1.551**
With father only	1.059	1.133	1.155	1.420
With mother only	1.117	0.654	1.313**	1.302
With a stepparent	0.934	1.279	1.029	1.001
With other kin	1.078	1.590	1.469*	0.723
Children in the household				
Number of girls younger than 16	1.017	1.035	1.027	0.903*
Number of boys younger than 16	0.954	0.984	0.976	0.998
Migration (Ref.=not a migrant.)				
Rural migrant	1.168**	0.638***	0.880	1.086
Urban migrant	0.784*	0.812	0.863	1.356
Nagelkerke's r^2	0.16		0.24	
Number of cases	4992		5345	
Model chi-square	706.74****		1148.02****	

Level of significance: * 0.1;** 0.05; *** 0.01;**** 0.001. *Notes:* Population at risk are all persons who married, who survived at least to the age of 50 years old, and whose partner had a known age. People married before age 20 have been removed.

7. Discussion

In this article, I aimed to deduce life scripts from micro-level life course variation and to contrast the outcomes to supposed (subgroup) shifts towards 'less instrumental' marriages during modernization. It is assumed that in the nineteenth and early twentieth century some social and cultural groups (city dwellers, middle classes, wage workers, Protestants) began to give a different meaning to marriage and thus to form different norms surrounding it. 'Instrumental' motives embedding marriage choices of children in the family economy began to lose their importance, whereas bourgeois ideals of the home and motherhood

became more popular, also among lower classes. Supposedly, there was an increased 'appetite' for romantic, egalitarian marriage. It is expected that in groups in which these norms spread marriage became more frequent (thus permanent celibacy declined), and converged to an 'ideal' age (thus delayed marriage was less frequent). Also, one can expect a trend toward more same-age marriages. Very early marriages were still frowned upon, but they may indicate strong 'desirability' of marriage in groups with low thresholds of 'feasibility'.

In studying life courses of 15697 persons born between 1850 and 1922, who all reached age fifty, I tried to find out whether deviation from assumed general norms point at subgroup norms or at individual of family reasons for premature, delayed or foregone marriage. Of course, there are many caveats to be mentioned. First of all, despite the (relative) wealth of information in the Historical Sample of the Netherlands, many factors that impact on courtship and partner choice are lacking (e.g. education, income, health). Second, I have only looked at the situation at age 18 to 'predict' future outcomes. Ideally, the impact of one's situation (family composition, place of residence, occupation) on marital choices is assessed at each age in a truly dynamic model. This is feasible, but highly complex. Third, the contextual information should ideally be extended with employment opportunities (in particular for women) and with information on the marriage market. Ideally, we would like to have information on the availability of partners at the subgroup level. Then we could answer questions such as: are preferences for an ideal marriage age or an ideally aged marriage partner affected by being a religious minority in a given region? Finally, the qualitative information on age norms is still sketchy, and mainly stemming from ethnographic material on rural customs. We know little on how age norms and sanctions functioned in an urban context.

Still, the outcomes suggest that indeed some groups 'lagged behind' in terms of a higher incidence of 'instrumental' late marriage and celibacy – but not in terms of a larger age difference between spouses. The latter is mainly explained by the timing of marriage as such. Other groups did show a tendency toward the 'modern' marriage norms (men living in cities, workers' children). But family factors remained important, as well as the individual experience of migrating and having to adjust to new surroundings.

In her discussion of age norms, Marini (1984) stated that the functioning of such norms can only be proven by juxtaposing detailed information on (subgroup) norms to determinants of life course variation. This paper has set a few steps in that direction and has shown the feasibility of that approach. However, much more information both on life courses within local contexts, as on the norms and sanctions of groups are needed.

References

Adams, C. 1996. A choice not to wed? Unmarried women in eighteenth-century France. *Journal of Social History* 30: 883-94.

Boonstra, O., H. Bras, and M. Derks. 2014. Historical research on cultural life scripts. An exploration of opportunities and future prospects. *Historical Social Research* 39 (1): 7-18.

Bras, H., and J. Kok. 2003. 'Naturally, Every Child Was Supposed to Work'. Determinants of the Leaving Home Process in The Netherlands, 1850-1940. In *The Road to Independence. Leaving Home in Western and Eastern Societies, 16th and 20th centuries,* ed. F. van Poppel, M. Oris, and J. Lee, 403-50. Bern: Peter Lang.

Bras, H., A. Liefbroer, and C. Elzinga. 2010. Standardization of pathways to adulthood? An analysis of Dutch cohorts born between 1850 and 1900. *Demography* 47: 1013-34.

Chambers-Schiller, L. V. 1984. *Liberty. A better husband. Single women in America: the generations of 1780-1840.* New Haven: Yale University Press.

Dixon, R. 1971. Explaining cross-cultural variation in age of marriage and proportion never marrying. *Population Studies* 25: 2156-233.

Dorsman, J., and M. Stavenuiter. 1993. *Nooit gehuwd, maar niet alleen: vrijgezelle vrouwen uit de arbeidende klasse in de tweede helft van de negentiende eeuw*. Hilversum: Verloren.

Engelen, T., and J. Kok. 2003. Permanent celibacy and late marriage in the Netherlands, 1890-1960. *Population-E*, 58: 67-96.

Froide, A. M. 2005. *Never married: single women in early modern England*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Gillis, J. 1985. *For better, for worse. British marriages. 1600 to the present*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Hacker, J. D. 2008. Economic, demographic and anthropometric correlates of first marriage in the mid-nineteenth-century United States. *Social Science History* 32: 307-45.

Israel, B. 2002. *Bachelor girl. The secret history of single women in the twentieth century*. New York: Harper Collins.

Knippenberg, H. 1992. *De religieuze kaart van Nederland. Omvang en geografische spreiding van de godsdienstige gezindten vanaf de Reformatie tot heden*. Assen and Maastricht: Van Gorcum.

Kohlbrugge, J. F. H. 1928. *Practische sociologie. Deel V Sociale nooden I. De vrouw, hoogere standen, degeneratie, alcohol*. Groningen: Wolters.

Kok, J. 2006. 'Eigen baas zijn, da's maar alles'. Huwelijksmotivatie van Rotterdammers uit de tweede helft van de negentiende eeuw. In *Naar Rotterdam. Immigratie en levensloop in Rotterdam vanaf het einde van de negentiende eeuw,* ed. P. van de Laar, L. Lucassen and K. Mandemakers, 99-118. Amsterdam: Aksant.

Kok, J., and J. van Bavel. 2006. Stemming the tide. Denomination and religiousness in the Dutch fertility transition, 1845-1945. In *Religion and the Decline of Fertility in the Western World,* ed. R. Derosas and F. Van Poppel, 83-105. Dordrecht: Springer.

Kok, J., Mandemakers, K., and D. Damsma. 2010. Atrophied Hearts? Partner Choice and Social Reproduction of Farmers in the North-Western Part of the Netherlands in the 19th and Early 20th Century. In *Many Paths to Happiness? Studies in Population and Family History. A Festschrift for Antoinette Fauve-Chamoux,* ed. M.-P. Arrizabalaga, I. Bolovan, M. Eppel, J. Kok, and M.L. Nagata, 362-387. Amsterdam: Aksant.

Mandemakers, K. 2006. Building life course datasets from population registers by the Historical sample of the Netherlands (HSN). *History and Computing* 14: 87-107.

Marini, M. M. 1984. Age and sequencing norms in the transition to adulthood. *Social Forces* 63: 229-44.

Matthijs, K. 2002. Mimetic Appetite for Marriage in Nineteenth-Century Flanders: Gender Disadvantage as an Incentive for Social Change. *Journal of Family History* 27: 101-27.

Matthijs, K. 2003. Demographic and Sociological Indicators of Privatisation of Marriage in the 19th Century in Flanders. *European Journal of Population* 19: 375-412.

Menard, S. 1995. *Applied Logistic Regression Analysis.* Thousand Oaks CA, London and New Delhi: Sage Publications.

Moreels, S., and K. Matthijs. 2011. Marrying in the City in Times of Rapid Urbanization. *Journal of Family History* 36: 72-92.

Shorter, E. 1975. *The making of the modern family*. New York: Basic Books.

Solinge, H. van, and F. van Poppel. 1995. Over oude vrijsters, knorrige vrijgezellen en snelle yuppen. De veranderende positie van ongehuwden en alleenstaanden in de samenleving. In *Alleenstaanden. Leven en werken door de geschiedenis heen*, ed. L. de Zwaan, 149-75. Den Haag: SDU.

Van de Putte, B., F. van Poppel, S. Vanassche, M. Sanchez, S. Jidkova, M. Eeckhaut, M. Oris, and K. Matthijs. 2009. The rise of age homogamy in 19th century Western Europe. *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 71: 1234-53.

Van Leeuwen, M. H. D., I. Maas, and A. Miles. 2002. *HISCO. Historical International Standard Classification of Occupations.* Leuven: Leuven University Press.

Van Leeuwen, M. H. D., and I. Maas. 2011. *HISCLASS. A Historical International Social Class Scheme.* Leuven: Leuven University Press.

Van Poppel, F., and J. Nelissen. 1999. The proper age to marry: Social norms and behavior in nineteenth-century Netherlands. *The History of the Family* 4: 51-75.

Van Poppel, F., and A. C. Liefbroer. 2001. Leeftijdsverschillen tussen huwelijkspartners: een interpretatie van veranderingen en verschillen in de negentiende en twintigste eeuw. *Tijdschrift voor Sociale Geschiedenis* 7: 129-52.

Vicinus, M. 1985. *Independent Women. Work and Community for Single Women 1850-1920.* London: Virago Press.